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THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

The National School Lunch Program is now operated under the authority established in the National School Lunch Act of June 1946 (Public Law 396, 79th Congress, Second Session). This Act provides for a grant-in-aid program under the direction of the Secretary of Agriculture, and authorizes annual appropriations in amounts sufficient to carry out the purposes and objectives of the Act.

Section 2 of the Act states:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress, as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food, by assisting the States, through grants-in-aid and other means, in providing an adequate supply of foods and other facilities for the establishment, maintenance, operation, and expansion of nonprofit school-lunch programs.

Federal assistance to school lunch operations began in 1933. In that year, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation provided loans to several communities in Missouri to pay labor costs of preparing and serving school lunches. By the end of 1934, assistance was being provided in 39 States through the Civil Works Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Later the Works Projects Administration and National Youth Administration furnished both labor and trained management personnel for lunchroom operations.

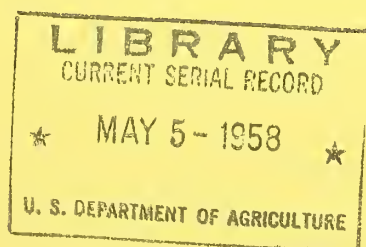
The enactment of Public Law 320, 74th Congress, in August 1935, made it possible for the Federal Government to provide additional assistance in the form of donated commodities. Section 32 of that Law appropriated annually an amount equal to 30 percent of all customs receipts for the general purpose of encouraging the exportation and domestic consumption of agricultural commodities.

One of the activities financed with Section 32 funds was the program for purchase of surplus food commodities and their distribution to eligible recipients. The Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation purchased the commodities and turned them over to State welfare agencies for distribution to nonprofit school lunch programs, charitable institutions, and welfare recipients. By March 1942, six million children were participating in lunch programs receiving surplus commodities.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE  
FOOD DISTRIBUTION DIVISION

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Our entry into World War II brought an unprecedented demand for food which, in turn, resulted in the production of a large volume of foods suitable for local purchase for school lunch programs. In March 1943, therefore, the Department of Agriculture announced that assistance would be granted in the form of cash reimbursement.

Under this program, any nonprofit public or private school was eligible. Local sponsoring groups entered into agreements with the Department to operate lunch programs in accordance with certain standards and regulations, and were reimbursed directly for a portion of their food expenditures. The most important of these operating standards were:

1. Lunches served should meet nutritional standards established by the Department of Agriculture.
2. The lunch program should be operated on a nonprofit basis.
3. Children unable to pay the full price of the lunch should be served at a reduced cost or free.

Direct distribution of surplus foods acquired by the Department continued, although the quantities available were substantially smaller than in prewar years. During fiscal years 1944 and 1945, Congress authorized the use of \$50 million of Section 32 funds for the operation of the school lunch program. In fiscal year 1946, Congress appropriated \$50 million of Section 32 funds and later voted a deficiency appropriation of \$7-1/2 million.

Passage of the National School Lunch Act of 1946 provided basic legislation authorizing Federal school lunch assistance, in the form of a State grant-in-aid program. It authorized the continuance of food assistance in the form of cash reimbursements for a portion of the food costs and direct distribution of suitable foods acquired by the Department of Agriculture in its purchase operations.

The Act also authorized the expenditure of funds for nonfood assistance, i.e., to assist schools in obtaining equipment for storing, preparing and serving lunches. However, funds for nonfood assistance have not been appropriated since the 1946-47 school year.

In addition, Section 6 of the Act authorized the expenditure of part of the food assistance funds for the direct purchase and distribution by the Department of certain foods which would improve the nutritional quality of the lunches served.



